DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 289 SP 034 544

TITLE	Educating the New American Student.
INSTITUTION	Renaissance Group, Cedar Falls, IA.
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	19p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Agency Cooperation; Consortia; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Change; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Institutional Mission; Mathematics Education; Minority Groups; Multicultural Education; *Needs Assessment; Schools of Education; Science Education; *Social Change; *Student Attitudes; *Student Behavior; Student Characteristics
IDENTIFIERS	*Collaboration for Improvement of Teacher Educ; *Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

The Renaissance Group, a consortium of 19 universities, was created in 1989 to improve the education of teachers and to facilitate efforts to reform teacher education nationally. One of the group's first priorities has been to analyze the growth of several largely environmental conditions such as the changing structure of the American family and the prevalence of aberrant student behavior, which are changing the face of classrooms today. The group contends that because socioeconomic changes have produced a new American student, school settings and the preparation of teachers must adapt accordingly, that meeting the challenge of the new American student should become a national priority, and that inadequate attention by educators and reformers to the special characteristics and needs of this new generation of students may be the weak link in the solution to the problem of educational reform. This booklet identifies and analyzes the following priority areas of need: (1) early childhood education; (2) science and mathematics education; (3) minority and multicultural programs; (4) instructional technology; and (5) interagency collaboration. Appendices provide a list of Renaissance group member institutions, and 12 key principles which, the group believes, undergird effective teacher education programs. (LL)

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EDUCATING THE NEW AMERICAN STUDENT

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PREFACE

The Renaissance Group, a consortium of 19 universities noted for their teacher education programs, was created in 1989 to improve the education of teachers on member campuses and to facilitate efforts to reform teacher education nationally.

Now educating one out of every 15 new American teachers, the Renaissance Group has adopted 12 key principles which it believes undergird effective teacher education programs. These principles, which appear at the end of this publication, are both statements of best practice and objectives to be achieved at colleges and universities that strive for quality programs for the education of teachers.

Another unique feature of the group is the requirement that the president, academic vice president, and education dean at each campus be actively involved in its work. Such a representative leadership structure helps mobilize university-wide support for the education of teachers and adds credibility to the group.

The attempt to mobilize entire universities in support of teacher education is unusual and holds extraordinary potential for enabling the Renaissance Group to make a significant contribution toward improving both its member institutions as well as American education.

The Renaissance Group's mission extends beyond improving the education of teachers at member campuses. Its members are engaged in inter-university research and collaborative projects aimed at educational reform and work with other professional groups and policy makers to influence state and national education policies. More than a dozen multi-university task forces have been established to advance this broad agenda.

Working alone and also collaboratively with others, Renaissance Group universities are experimenting with innovative educational models in key areas. They are developing new curricula, teaching strategies and textbooks and undertaking studies to assist public policy makers and educational leaders.

One of the group's first priorities has been to analyze the growth of several largely environmental conditions which are changing the face of many classrooms today.

These external factors, such as the changing structure of the American family and the prevalence of aberrant student behavior, have impeded effective teaching and learning and left the general public wondering what is wrong with today's schools.

These socioeconomic changes have been so profound that they are producing a new American student, who is often radically different from students of a generation or two ago. Indeed, the times and the students are changing. The Renaissance Group contends that school settings and the preparation of teachers must adapt accordingly and that meeting the challenge of the new American student is so crucial to the nation's future that it should become a national priority.

Renaissance Group Challenge

The Renaissance Group has taken that challenge in earnest and is focusing its initial efforts in five select areas of paramount need:

1. Early childhood education
2. Science/mathematics education
3. Minority and multicultural programs
4. Instructional technology
5. Interagency collaboration.

THE NEW AMERICAN STUDENT

THE NEW AMERICAN STUDENT

American educators and public policy makers worked throughout the 1980s to respond to the perceived erosion of educational quality in the nation's schools. The impetus for reform first gained national prominence in 1983 with the issuance of *A Nation at Risk*. Since then, most states have made additional attempts to overhaul American schools and teacher education programs.

The America 2000 strategy is the latest major new reform initiative. America 2000 seeks to focus national attention once more on the crisis in American education and offers possible solutions such as national educational goals, higher academic standards, radical school reform, and national testing to measure student competencies.

Studies which show that the achievements of American students trail those of students in most other industrial countries have undermined the credibility of American schools and their teachers. Simultaneously, the United States' loss of world fiscal and industrial superiority has heightened the sense that a restoration of quality to the schools is urgently needed for the country's survival in the global marketplace.

Renaissance Group members believe that inadequate attention by educators and reformers to the special characteristics and needs of the new generation of American students may be the weak link in the solution to the seemingly intractable problem of educational reform.

In order to test this hypothesis, the Renaissance Group has adopted as a centerpiece of its own educational reform efforts a focus on the unique educational requirements for educating today's students.

If the crisis in the schools is influenced significantly by pervasive socioeconomic conditions, as many educators suspect, then some current reform efforts may be misdirected and explain why schools have been so immune to reform.

America's love-hate relationship with its educational system is often complicated by a fundamental misunderstanding of the dynamics that characterize the country's classrooms today. These unrelenting conditions, which impede student performance, challenge as never before teachers' ability to educate.

Today's students are generally different from students of the past in large measure because their backgrounds are dissimilar. The homes of so many of them have been battered, and the American family is left in an historically low, weakened condition. One in two marriages now ends in divorce. Almost half of the nation's youth will spend some years before they reach 18 being raised by a single parent. In 1988, 4.3 million American children were living with a mother who had never married — seven times higher than in 1970. Two million additional children are being raised by someone other than a parent.

Over 2 million school-age children have no supervision after school. About 10 percent of all children entering the first grade already suffer from physical or emotional handicaps.

Acute poverty has scarred many American school children today. Of all the industrialized countries, the U.S. has the highest proportion of children living in poverty. Twenty-four percent of all five-year-olds live below the federal poverty line. In some urban centers such as Los Angeles, fully half of all children live in poverty and are three times as likely to drop out of school.

Eight million qualified low-income families are now competing with one another for only four million low-income housing units in the U.S. One out of every 10 Americans uses food stamps.

A 1990 U.S. Census Bureau study of children in developed countries reveals that American children were the most vulnerable in almost all categories of the study, including: (1) number of children living in poverty, (2) number of children affected by divorce, (3) infant mortality rate, (4) youth homicide rate, and (5) teen-age pregnancy rate.

The increase of American crime, violence, gangs and drug use has turned many schools and classrooms into virtual battlefields. Approximately 135,000 American children bring a gun to school each day. Students assault 130,000 teachers each year.

One study has shown that 13 percent of American students have been threatened with a weapon; six percent have been injured by a weapon. By the end of high school, 61 percent of all students will have used drugs in some form at some time.

Twenty years of declining college entrance test scores and low educational achievements have traumatized many Americans, and people are now writing about opportunities missed forever and the passing of the American Dream.

RENAISSANCE GROUP'S PLAN OF ACTION

Renaissance Group's Plan of Action

Because of this compelling evidence that the crisis in American education is both a social and an educational problem, the Renaissance Group seeks a more comprehensive understanding of those circumstances which have spawned today's schooling crisis. Such knowledge will then enable member universities to prepare better teachers, develop new strategies and instructional models, and undertake studies to benefit professional educators and public policy makers.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early Childhood Education

In the search for solutions to the schooling problem, renewed emphasis on the crucial importance of early childhood education is imperative. A child's personal, social and ultimate educational development is determined very early. By the age of three, the average child's attitudes toward learning and patterns for future development are well established.

Thus, there is an urgent national need to focus far more attention in preschool and early elementary grades to combat those conditions that impede children's educational development.

The Renaissance Group will be participating in a variety of activities that enhance the potential of children to benefit from school. These activities include:

- Preparation and dissemination of information on current and new models of early childhood education.
- Active participation in the development of new national and state standards and policies for effective early childhood education.
- Preparation and dissemination of information on current and new models of cooperation between private and public early childhood programs.
- Undertaking inter-university research and demonstration projects on critical issues affecting the delivery of effective early childhood education such as appropriate funding requirements, standards for measuring quality education, and inter-agency coordination.
- Evaluation of campus programs and assurance of member compliance with the following characteristics of quality early childhood teacher education programs.
    1. Placements in quality "educare" settings, child centered environments in kindergarten through grade three, and infant and toddler settings
    2. Early childhood inservice education for teachers and administrators.
    3. Parent education curricula.
    4. Integrated service delivery systems.
    5. Pre-primary education curricula.
    6. Coverage of diversity issues
    7. Demonstration of advocacy for children and families.

Science/ Mathematics Education

SCIENCE/MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

The growth of scientific knowledge in the twentieth century has been without precedent in human history; science and technology permeate the American culture. As never before, mathematical/scientific situations require mathematical/scientific decisions; thus, literacy in this area has become an educational necessity.

Effective professional development of teachers, both preservice and inservice, must be defined specifically in relationship to what students need to know and be able to do. Professional development needs to be sustained and intense with a clear focus on discipline-based and pedagogical content as well as the use of contemporary instructional tools.

Students should repeatedly think critically, analyze information, communicate scientific ideas, function as part of a team, solve problems, and discover and use the power of abstract thought.

Feedback should be analytical, suggestive and be provided at a time when the student can most benefit. High expectations in science and mathematics should be set for all students.

Teaching should be consistent with the nature of scientific and mathematical inquiry. It should engage students actively, concentrate on the collection and use of evidence, and provide historical perspectives. It should insist on clear expression and not separate knowing from discovery nor emphasize the memorization of technological vocabulary or algorithms. It should welcome curiosity and reward creativity.

The plan of action for improving science and mathematics education for Renaissance Group universities includes the following:

- Develop programs for recruiting and then retaining students who will become science/mathematics teachers and scholars.
- Implement inter-university collaborative projects that involve K-12 teachers in the reform of science and mathematics education.
- Review undergraduate requirements for science and mathematics education in light of the need to improve learning for a variety of educational and career goals and where necessary, suggest appropriate changes.

Minority and Multicultural Programs

MINORITY AND MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMS

The Renaissance Group's strong commitment to multiculturalism on each of its campuses includes establishing teacher education programs that reflect American diversity and whose graduates can function with increasing effectiveness in a pluralistic society.

The need for such an approach is apparent. Today's school population is increasingly diverse. Projections indicate that one-third of American students at all levels will be composed of people of color by the year 2000. At the same time, however, the teaching force remains mainly Caucasian. While nine percent of today's teachers are underrepresented minorities, they will slip to five percent by the end of the decade.

These projections have important implications for American education and the nation. As journalist Neal Peirce writes: "Unless we can provide a better education for this growingly diverse population, there'll be an ominous cloud over our national future."

An essential first step in adjusting to these changing conditions is for the faculty and staff at member universities to reflect the diversity of their students. Such diversity with regard to gender, race, and national origin allows teachers to serve as role models and mentors for students. It helps universities address the many needs of a multicultural student body and enriches the educational environment of campuses. Equally significant, such balance fosters multicultural learning and understanding for majority students as well.

Students who are preparing to become teachers need a set of experiences that reflect multiculturalism, ethnic pluralism, and sex equity awareness. The process of educating teachers about multicultural perspectives and the influence of gender upon perceptions is a lengthy one, typically progressing from awareness to acceptance to affirmation. This learning continues as teachers mature as professionals in the field.

It is significant that the principles upon which the Renaissance Group was founded recognize

multiculturalism as a campus-wide responsibility. Only when there is a university-wide feeling of responsibility can an ideal multicultural education occur. This includes the development of an understanding of and respect for diverse groups and cultures, an understanding of the role of gender as it overlaps the boundaries of race and national origin, an immersion experience with a different culture, an understanding of the cognitive foundations of teaching and learning, and the development of effective multicultural teaching skills.

Actions which Renaissance Group Universities will take to promote gender-fair minority and multicultural programs include:

- Recruit an appropriately diverse faculty and staff at each member university.
- Develop model programs for teacher recruitment of under-represented students who can relate well to today's students.
- Build equally strong retention programs to sustain these recruits.
- Make a special effort to enlist the active support of university faculty and staff for effective gender-fair multicultural teacher education programs.
- Establish an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to gender-fair multiculturalism in all liberal studies and teacher preparation courses.
- Include multicultural and sex equity education components in all introduction, assessment, and instructional methods courses.
- Provide mandatory placement for clinical experiences, internships, and student teaching in as culturally and linguistically diverse schools as possible.
- Initiate inter-university research and demonstration projects on critical issues affecting minority, multicultural, and sex equity education programs.
- Exchange information on minority, multicultural, and sex equity education programs with member universities.

Instructional Technology

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY

Since an effective educational system must be integrated into the society in which it functions, the most effective teaching and learning strategies for schools must mirror those strategies which are common in society, change when they change, and thus be familiar to new and continuing students.

Indeed, learning in American society is undergoing dramatic change. Traditional parent-child teaching interactions are being replaced by hours spent interacting with technology. Television, computers, computer games, radio, video and audio tapes and discs are common tools to many young children and are often the information sources with which they are most familiar.

American formal education must recognize the importance of the technological tidal wave in the home and society and the way these changes shape the learning environment in which many students are experienced and comfortable.

Educational institutions must also recognize the immense potential of technology for instruction and adopt technological innovations in the classroom. Today's technology can facilitate conversations among students separated by time, space, language, and culture. It can link them to video images of famous people and places, to distant libraries, and to the latest in public affairs. Computer assisted instruction, interactive video discs, simulation, fiber optics, electronic libraries, hyper-media, and a variety of other high technology instructional mechanisms can enrich teaching in classrooms throughout the nation.

The nature of the American workplace is also changing with an increasing proportion of jobs requiring more technical skill. A growing number of these will require computer, media, or technology-related skills. Thus students must be prepared to interact with these technological advances to ensure a smooth transition to the occupational future which awaits them.

In response to these changing needs, the Renaissance Group universities will initiate selected research and demonstration activities which will:

- Gain a clearer understanding of the variance in technological preparation of incoming students and how this affects their success in a variety of instructional strategies.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different technological innovations in a variety of instructional settings.
- Examine existing systems for connecting elementary and secondary schools to data bases and expand and interconnect these, as appropriate.
- Study the interface between technology used as an instructional device and job preparedness of graduating students.
- Develop resource, data and information pools among member universities.
- Develop collaborative software programs to improve academic instruction.
- Develop mechanisms for sharing library and other information resources on the impact of technology on learning strategies.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Interagency Collaboration

After a decade of educational reform activity, one conclusion is certain: educating today's new American student requires a nationwide effort involving parents, schools, universities, policy makers, business, and numerous other public and private groups. The African proverb that it takes an entire village to educate a child can be paraphrased, "It takes the whole nation to educate today's new American student."

Because today's schooling crisis is as much a social problem as it is an educational dilemma, segmented approaches to reform will no longer suffice. The challenge is too great for splintered and uncoordinated activities.

The quest for solutions must be extended to those environments in which children exist when not in school.

Solutions must be sought in most realms that impact youth, including private volunteer programs and governmental agencies.

Non-profit voluntary youth development organizations are second only to public schools in the number of youth and the amount of time spent with youth in educational and developmental programs. They offer educational and developmental programs that are an extraordinary opportunity and resource for the continued development of American youth. What is required is closer coordination and cooperation among all major private and public youth development activities, including formal educational programs in schools and universities.

In defining the aspects of successful cooperation and collaboration among those who hold a stake in youth development, new attitudes of acceptance of alternative methods of education need to be fostered. New spheres of cooperation must replace existing separatist relationships. New partnerships between formal and non-formal education are necessary.

Such cooperation needs to be extended with the establishment of alternative models of schooling that involve partnerships among schools, youth organizations, businesses, and parents.

There is a role for Renaissance Group universities in facilitating higher levels of collaboration. The group's plan of action includes:

- Develop and assess alternative models of schooling for selected youth which involves partnerships in both school and non-school settings.
- Explore new approaches to broadening community education as practiced in regions throughout the country.
- Develop experimental partnerships with schools, volunteer programs, governmental agencies, and businesses to enhance the education of the new American student.

- Sponsor state and regional conferences, seminars, and "youth summits" for private and public groups, including educators, to promote broader coordination and cooperation among those involved in the education and development of American youth.
- Undertake cooperative projects and intra-university research on the need for improving interagency cooperation and on strategies and techniques for effecting policy to support this improvement.

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APPENDIX 1

Renaissance Group

Renaissance Group

University of Alabama at Birmingham
Ball State University
California State University at San Bernardino
California State University at Fresno
Eastern Michigan University
Emporia State University
Georgia Southern University
Illinois State University
Middle Tennessee State University
Millersville University of Pennsylvania
Norfolk State University
Sam Houston State University
Towson State University
University of Northern Colorado
University of Northern Iowa
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
Western Kentucky University
Western Washington University
Winthrop University

APPENDIX 2

Twelve Principles of the Renaissance Group

1. The education of teachers is an all-campus responsibility.
2. Programs for the preparation of teachers thrive in a university culture that values quality teaching.
3. Decisions concerning the education of teachers are the shared responsibility of the university faculty, practitioners, and other related professionals.
4. The initial preparation of teachers is integrated throughout a student's university experience and is not segmented or reserved to the student's final year.
5. The appropriate role of the state is to establish outcome expectations for teacher education graduates; the appropriate role of the university is to determine the curriculum standards, and internal policies for teacher education programs.
6. Rigorous learning expectations and exit requirements characterize the program to educate teachers.
7. The academic preparation of teachers includes a rigorous general education program, in-depth subject matter preparation, and both general and content-specific preparation in teaching methodology.
8. Teacher education programs reflect American diversity and prepare graduates to teach in a pluralistic and multicultural society.
9. The education of teachers incorporates extensive and sequenced field and clinical experiences.
10. Quality teacher preparation programs have faculty who are active in scholarly and professional endeavors.
11. The continuing professional development of teachers and other education personnel is the shared responsibility of the university faculty and other education professionals.
12. Programs to educate teachers for the new world have sufficient support to implement these principles.

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